Rabbi Avend activiated Community Through Gallery, Art

by Karen Muskat, Community: Voices, Opinions, Visual Arts
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Deeply committed to the well-being of the community, Rabbi Avend activated an artist to work with the Jewish students at the University of Illinois, in collaboration with the Yiddish Museum in Chicago. The initiative was part of a larger project that aimed to foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of Jewish art and culture.

As a graduate student at the University of Illinois, Rabbi Avend worked with the Yiddish Museum to organize an exhibition of contemporary Jewish art. The exhibition featured works by well-known artists, as well as emerging talent, and was designed to challenge conventional perceptions of Jewish art and culture.

The exhibition included a range of multimedia works, from paintings and sculptures to installations and performances. It showcased a diverse array of themes, including the role of Jewish art in shaping identity and cultural heritage, as well as its contributions to the broader artistic landscape.

How did you become involved with the Yiddish Museum and the Student YCC?

As a graduate student at the University of Illinois, I worked in the university’s exhibition space. Moving to the Yiddish Museum, I collaborated with the Yiddish and student artists in the community. In addition, I was able to work with the Yiddish Museum to develop the exhibition and the visiting artists’ program.

How are the exhibits planned?

We are able to engage the community in a slightly different way through our exhibitions. The exhibition is designed to connect with the community and to encourage the development of new ideas, such as Yiddish folkloric, Jewish visual arts, and political issues. Our goal is to foster new dialogues and to connect with other artists.

Describe your artistic background.

My work comes from the yiddish art field, where I am trained in my training. I am a passionate about it. I work with letterpress printing, using lead and wood blocks of letters. My work focuses around language, symbols, and lettering. In addition, I work with the Yiddish Museum to translate the works into the space in which we are living together.

In a process that requires a high degree of craftsmanship and effort.

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Some words were condition were consistent: daughter mother, artist. Some words described things that could change over time: caffeinated, inhabited, outsider. Each word was printed on a stack of 100 business cards and distributed to the audience. The participants were invited to create their own stories and add their own words to the original set.

There is such hope and optimism in allowing the audience to build something together, the audience in effect becoming the artist.

You have to tell, give up control. The artist could go on any way intended or unintended, it could even be destroyed. I like that exchange, and knowing that the text that can happen outweighs the work you defend it.